

The Deserted Valley

there were millions of drowned centipedes, the small brown variety it is true, but covering the stones for yards, satiating the fish.

But there was never a bird, never an animal, never a human being or the remotest sign of one. This valley used to be full of swarms of gemmed parakeets, "of great grey wood-pigeons, of small green and maroon doves, of long-tailed cuckoos, and of the lovely little native kingfishers flashing up the stream. You can read of them in Hermann Melville's books authentically, and elsewhere, because most modern Tahiti tales are vivid in imagination. That is the best word. It avoids libel actions.

Well, there is not one left. Maina birds, introduced by the Government in a mad scheme for the destruction of insects, and chicken hawks later to destroy the maina birds, have massacred the lot. Now the hawks eat chickens and the maina birds fruit in the sea belt. And

Western cats
fatten on maina birds. Only the blue
heron, the
wild duck, and the white frigate birds
still defy fate
along the more inaccessible shores,
and these the
sporting Frenchman thins as quickly
as he can.

So, at long last, I followed a turn
which brought